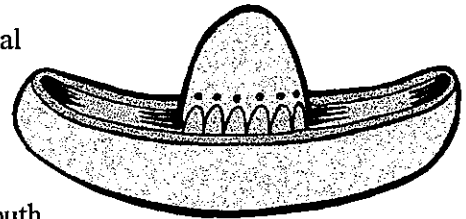


Tecolote 99

Pete Hollings

March 1999 found me returning to Austin to participate in the latest PEP expedition. On this occasion I joined 12 Americans and three Mexico City cavers for a six day camp in Cueva del Tecolote (Owl Cave). Despite the fact that the previous expedition had visited an area new to the Project, and left two extremely promising caves, it had been decided that 99 was the year to return to Tecolote. The PEP had not worked Tecolote for 8 or 9 years, when they had undertaken a 10 day camp at Camp Three, in the far reaches of the 32km long cave.

I arrived in Austin on March 4 and quickly became involved in the usual vehicle maintenance and gear sorting. The next day we packed up our gear and waited as everyone rendezvoused at the house of Peter Sprouse and Susie Lasko, the project leaders. Around 8pm four trucks headed out and soon picked up another as we were joined by California cavers Matt Oliphant and Nancy Pistole. We then drove south reaching the border crossing at Reynosa around 4am. After some brief confusion, when it turned out they had moved the visa office/customs house, we settled down for what turned out to be a long wait. It eventually took us four hours to get everyone's paperwork. We had a few problems as some of the rules appeared to have changed. Jack "Solo" White quickly found out that the birth certificate that had been sufficient to get into Mexico on previous occasions was no longer good enough. Fortunately the same certificate, when attached to a \$20 bill was acceptable.



We made it into Ciudad Victoria around noon and picked up the three cavers from Mexico City (Laura Rosales, Gustavo Vela and Antonio Soriano). From there it was only three hours of 4WD road to the village of Los San Pedros, and that included a stop at a swimming hole along the way. We parked the trucks in a field near the entrance to Tecolote, and while most of us stretched our stiff limbs, Solo, Charley Savvas, Ray Keeler and Bev Shade prepared to take Charley's Bosch drill on a rigging trip. Around midnight they were back at the trucks having rigged the first six drops down to Flowstone Drop.

Everyone was up early on Sunday (7 March) and duffles were quickly packed. While most weighed in around the 40lb mark, Ray Keeler managed a monster 52lbs (given the luxuries he was to produce in camp this was hardly surprising). We parked the trucks within the corral of the village jefe and wandered down to the entrance around noon. The entrance to Tecolote is fairly impressive, measuring some 20m square. The 15m entrance drop is permanently rigged with the tread of a WW2 bulldozer. This allows the locals to enter the cave for water in the dry season and makes for an interesting descent. Most of the early drops were fairly short and the low water levels in the entrance series meant that most of us dispensed with the wetsuits that had been used in the past, a good thing too as Tecolote is a very hot cave. In fact the water levels were so low that it was necessary to rig a rope to climb out of Soapsud Sump.

When we reached Flowstone Drop, we loaded up with the ropes and group gear that they had left there, and headed on in. Soon we were at the 25m drop into the Ides March, a nice section of walking passage with only Anxiety Canyon in the middle to spoil the fun (and even this isn't all that bad). At the end of the Ides March was another 25m drop into the Sal de Puente, from where a fixed rope up a flowstone ramp led us into camp. Just below the ramp was the Galactic Trash Compactor. It is here that all the debris washed in from the entrance ends up. Given that we counted at least 20 truck tires and too many metres of plastic pipe on the way in, this is one area that will likely always be choked with rubbish.

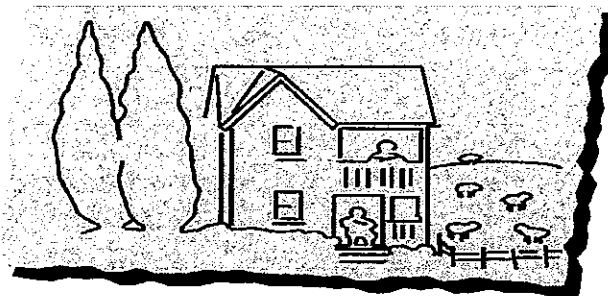
More on Tecolote on Pages 6 & 7...

MENDIP CAVING GROUP

Nordrach Cottage
 Charterhouse – on – Mendip
 Blagdon
 Bristol BS40 7XW. Tel. 01761 462797

High quality caving accommodation available for bookings of up to 16 people. All usual charging facilities, keys etc. Guests £2.50 per night.

Ben Cooper (Cottage Warden) Tel. 01256 364199
 Or email: ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk
 M.C.G. information: - Tim Francis (Secretary)
 Tel. 0181 392 2572 email: t.francis@nopres.co.uk



Weekly Meetings:

- At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.30 pm
- At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, on Tuesdays around 10pm or at the cottage at 7pm for caving trips.

Prepayment

(Available to members only) 12 nights accommodation £15.00
 25 nights accommodation £30.00
 55 nights accommodation £55.00

Stickers:

Annual

Full and Probationary members : £25.00

Subscriptions:

Associate members : £12.50

Reciprocal Rights:

MCG (members only) have reciprocal booking rights with SWCC and NPC.
 NPC bookings via Nic Blundell on tel. : 01203 713849 (home) or 01203 838940 (work) or on email : nic.blundell@bigfoot.com.
 SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton tel. : 01703 736997. Email : ian_m@tcp.co.uk

THE 1999 - 2000 COMMITTEE :

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR.	Tel : 0181 392 2572 t.francis@nopres.co.uk
Caving Secretary	Julie Hesketh	23, Ashleigh House, Mortlake High Street, London, SW14 8SH.	Tel : 0802 431588 julie.hesketh@cbi.org.uk
Tacklemaster	Marcus Ward	56, Barn Meadow Close, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants, GU13 0YB.	Tel : 01252 815112 m.ward@nichicon.co.uk
Cottage Warden	Ben Cooper	10 Coronation Road, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG1 4HA.	Tel : 01256 364199 ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk
Editor	Letti Patte	Lairg House, 38 Middlehill, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey. TW20 0JL	Tel : 01784 741508 LPATTE@STEELCASE-STRAFOR.COM
Recorder / Librarian	Wayne Hiscox	3, Keward, Glastonbury Road, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1TR.	Tel : 01749 671282
Social Secretary	Pete Moseley	Pendle Cottage, Mearway, Westhay, Glastonbury, Somerset, BA6 9TZ.	Tel : 01458 860524

Rescue Warden
Conservation Officer
Cottage Extension

Brian Snell 01329 238341
 Marcus Ward 01252 815112
 Wayne Hiscox 01749 671282

Examiners

James Allen & Martin Rowe

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News in Brief

Change of address :

Dave Tooke & Letti Patte to : Lairg House, 38 Middlehill, Englefield Green, Egham, surrey. TW20 oJL. Tel. 01784 741508.

Useful web address for SRT etc. by Brian Snell :

http://www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/~arb/speleo.html	General stuff
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~stymssl1/cave/vgear.htm	SRT
http://www.cavepage.magna.com.au/cave/SRTrig.htm	SRT
http://www.cavepage.magna.com.au/cave/SRT.htm	SRT

Note from the Meets Secretary :

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) have offered MCG members and friends a free drystone walling course at the cottage on Saturday 7th August (a Members weekend) in order to finish off our garden wall. Their trainer may be available on the Sunday too, depending on how much progress we make on Saturday!

Places are not limited but there is a limit to how many people will physically be able to fit around the wall so it is important that I give an idea of numbers to the BTCV in advance. If you would like to learn to wall, then contact Julie Hesketh.

"Cautionary tales" or "what a twit" column by Ian McKechnie :

We all know when to take care, don't we?

In a cave, there is plenty of danger, and we take all the safety precautions to ensure we come out in one piece. I have a long record of injury-free caving.

On the road, potential danger surrounds us all the time. We drive carefully, so that we don't cause an accident, and we minimise the risk of getting involved in the accident someone else has caused.

In the mountains, we step carefully, carry spare clothing and food in case the weather changes, and use a rope for protection when necessary.

So where are the really dangerous places?

Three weeks ago, I had just descended Ben Alder in Scotland and was back on level ground, when I slipped and fell on my wrist, which broke.

During my subsequent visits to the hospital fracture clinic, I have conducted a straw poll among the other patient. Conclusion: most of the injuries occurred in the home, in the street, at school, walking the dog... all the places we think of as safe.

So keep up the safety precautions underground. But don't forget to take just as much care walking back from the cave... or showering, back at the cottage... or downing that first pint in the pub..... Or I'll see you in the fracture clinic!

A little quote for the MCG that I came across to sneak in the newsletter- by Tim Francis :

"Tea with us became more than an idealization of the form of drinking; it is a religion of the art of life." - - ?

Okakura
or indeed anything from:

<http://www.stashtea.com/quotes.htm>

Forward Meets Programme :



**MARK
THIS
DATE**

DATE	VENUE	EVENTS	CONTACT
23 rd – 24 th & 25 th July	Portland MCG Meet	Julie is organising a trip to the Caves of Portland, near Weymouth in Dorset. For more information contact →	Julie on 0171 395 8053 (day) 0802 431 1588 (eves) julie.hesketh@cbi.org.uk
14 th August	Mendip Shatter Cave (Fairy Quarry)	10am. Please let Julie Hesketh know if you wish to go on this trip - one of the first opportunities to go into the previously closed and well decorated Shatter Cave. Places limited.	
7 th August	Nordrach Cottage	BTCV have offered MCG members and friends a free drystone walling course at the cottage in order to finish off our garden wall. More info on Page 3	
10 th – 22 nd August	Picos de Europa	A 12 day trip to Spain caving & walking. For more information contact →	Joan Goddard Or Martin Rowe
10 th – 12 th September	Leeds	BCRA Hidden Earth Conference. Leeds. Includes MCG talk on the 1998 expedition to Madagascar. Details available from the BCRA website on http://www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/~arb/bcra/index.html Or contact Pete Cousins on (01543) 251791	
11 th & 12 th September	Mendip Hills	A Cheddar & Mendip Walking Festival is being organised including walks ranging from 'family interest' to 'serious walkers'	Gorgeous Walks 01934 742688 tgo.cheddar@btinternet.com
1 st 3 weeks in October	Madagascar	Return to the Bemaraha. Tim & Ben have expressed an interest in a three week trip.	Tim Francis t.francis@nopres.co.uk
6 th - 7 th November	Nordrach Cottage	Half-yearly meeting. Contact Tim Francis for details of the forum. Skittles evening in the New Inn. For more information contact →	Tim Francis t.francis@nopres.co.uk Pete Moseley
13 th & 14 th Nov.	Mendip	CSCC training event.	



Cottage Bookings by Ben Cooper :

Date	Nights	Numbers	Who
6/8/99	2	8	Lost World CC
20/8/99	2	14	CBI
3/9/99	2	10 Guests (L. Milne)	(Numbers to be confirmed)
24/9/99	2	12	Caswell Outdoor Pursuits
10/9/99	2	20	Heston & Isleworth Scout Fellowship
13/11/99	1	10	CUCC
9/6/00	2	?	Gloucester Guides

LONG DAY AHEAD

By Lynn Furneaux

15th May 1999

After a 4.15 am start at Okehampton Army Camp on Dartmoor and forty-two breakfasts later, we saw all our seven teams off on the fortieth Ten Tors Event, at 7.00 am. With hopes and prayers for good weather, they were off, and hopefully to return back at Okehampton Camp by 5.00 p.m. on Sunday. By 7.30 am Bill and I were on the road to the M.C.G. Cottage for our first cave rescue practice. As usual Bill and I were early, hence some of the members were still in bed. Bill was to be on the rescue team and I was to be the casualty (victim).

After walking down to the Water Wheel Cave we made our way down to the rift where Brian rigged up ropes and pulleys for the practice rescue. After this I was to go down to the bottom of the rift and await my rescue. From this point on I can tell you how I felt. Once Marcus Letti and Big Tim strapped me to the stretcher my life was in the hands of the rescue team. My body shaking with fear and excitement of what was going to be something different which I had no control over.

My mind on the other hand was screaming with fear (i.e. let me out, I don't like this, do they know what they're doing? what if they drop me?). Slowly they lifted me up the rift, at one point I was standing upright strapped to the stretcher. All I could hear was people talking to each other and listening to their team leader. By then I knew I was going nowhere but out in one piece. These people were here because they wanted to be.

It's a very strange feeling laying on your back strapped up and having no control. Inch by inch they lifted me along and over rocks, still talking to me and each other, looking out for the shoulders, mind the head, rocks near face, are you cold? are you OK?, slow down, gently, rest, change over, were the words I constantly heard.

I never realised the shapes and colours you could see in this position, I remember thinking at the bottom of the rift, when the only things I could see were lights shining down from the top of the rift, with the darkness behind them, with the water softly flowing down over the side of the rock, where was my camera?

After a while you seem to lose your bearings on where you are with in the tunnel. If you think about it, how many times do we cave flat on our backs moving at a slow pace but not really moving or caving?

After about two and half-hours, my three mugs of tea and two cups of orange juice took revenge. (Sometimes you just can't go on). Finally we came to a tight hole and the stretcher would not go through so back down yet again. She will have to go through on the drag sheet they said". (Oh no I don't—not yet!!!) Please get me out of this mummy suit I begged I need a wee. Like the gentlemen they are they quickly released me. PURE HEAVEN!!!

Once I was strapped to the mummy suit and listening to the abuse from above I was yet again ready to continue. But no, wait. It was Marcus' turn, he could not cross his leg any longer. Geoff had to remind me where I was within the cave. One of the things I find incredible is how the people around me can turn their bodies around in such a way to lift the stretcher and move it in such a gentle way.

One more slog to go up to the entrance. They never complained if they were tired, or fed up, they just keep going. I could not understand why Ben came up the tube with me. (This is a bit tight for two Ben) he then explained why. He was keeping me straight and away from the steps. Thanks Ben. Three and a half-hours later not tired or dirty like the rest, I was out.

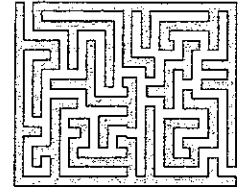
This write up is for the people I spent my Saturday with. The pure strength stamina and team work to bring someone out of a cave. Thank you.

Also thanks Bill for kicking me into doing this trip he knew how hard it was for me that day. 6.30 Sunday morning we were up again (I am beginning to forget what sleep is). 8.00 we were on the road and in Okehampton Camp by 9.30. We saw all our seven teams back home safe and sound with medals.

Continues from Front Page..

Camp I turned out to be a pretty comfortable cave camp by any standards. We were spread out along ~100m of 5m square passage, with sleeping areas picked out on the flat mud banks to either side. The presence of a perched pool meant that we were able to set up a shower at one end of camp with the latrine at the other.

Monday the 8th was our first chance to push some of the many leads that Peter had identified for us. While most of us were heading into an area known as the Mickey Mouse Maze, Solo was keen to lead a group out to Jelly Bean Junction so he headed out with Charley, Matt and Nancy. Jack had identified this lead on a previous camp and had been anticipating his return for many years.



For the rest of us it was an easy trip out into the maze area. Much of the route took us down the spectacular Fantasia Borehole, which was typically 10-15m high and at least 20m wide. Only the dark, light absorbing mud spoiled the beauty of this passage, but as we were to learn over the week the mud is everywhere in Tecolote. We turned off Fantasia into the Yucky Poodle Trunk and from there into the maze proper. One feature of this area is the extremely sharp yet brittle nature of the limestone, every hand or foot hold must be checked twice as a slip would be painful, to say the least. We spent the next hour or so orientating ourselves in the Goofy's Borehole area, a complex section of fracture controlled passage. Eventually Peter had everything straightened out and was able to find the leads he was looking for.

We split into three survey teams; Bev, Tim Stich, Kevin Stafford and Laura headed into an area of north trending passage, the Missouri Crawlway, that opened out into what became known as the South Park Series (continuing the cartoon theme of the Mickey Mouse Maze). Ray, Bill Stephens, Soriano and Aaron Addison climbed into the Gargoyle Gallery and pushed leads near the top of Slimy's Pit. Peter, Susie, Gustavo and I mapped a couple of small loops in the main maze area, then headed off to Bullwinkles Borehole. Our first lead (Pugwash Passage) was mainly walking passage and after around 90m popped out into some significant borehole. However, my excitement was short lived as this turned out to be known borehole in the vicinity of Dumbo Junction (which marks the end of the Yucky Poodle Trunk). We mapped a total of 170m before meeting with the other teams to navigate back out through the maze, and head back to camp.

Bev's crew mapped 140m with the passage still going strong with numerous side leads, while Rays team picked up 200m and also left going passage. Around 6am, about 5 hours after the rest of us, Solo's team returned having mapped 740m upstream in what was to become known as the Jelly Bean River. They had been mapping in large trunk passage, making their way upstream through occasional swims and heading south into a blank area on the map.

The following day saw the start of the time distortion that became a feature of this camp. Bev and Ray led their teams (with the exception of Tim who wasn't feeling too good) back to the same areas, leaving camp around 3pm and planning on a 15 hour trip. Peter, Susie, Gustavo and I headed to a different area, the Spine Line. We left camp and headed through the Russian Dancer, a wide but low section of passage. Before entering the Fantasia Borehole we turned off into the Spine Line where we almost immediately began eliminating leads. Most of the early ones were too small to warrant surveying, however about half way along we checked out one side lead that had ended in a breakdown choke. Peter wanted to relocate the survey stations towards the end as he hoped to connect into this from a different lead. By closing this loop he hoped to improve the accuracy of the survey in this area, which currently has a large loop error. Once that was done we headed on to a two metre square lead that appeared to be heading south into a blank area on the map, unfortunately it quickly looped back into the main passage. Next we headed to the other end of Peter's loop, the lead had been mapped for five stations and for a while continued as nice walking passage before closing down and becoming muddy shortly before the breakdown. However a little work saw the connection made and we headed back to camp with most of the Spine Line leads mopped up. We made it back around 1am with 280m of survey in the bag. Bev's crew were a couple of hours behind us, having picked up 200m in the South Park series, in a section of south trending borehole. Ray's crew were the last ones back having mapped 410m in the Tasmanian Trunk which they left with plenty of going leads.

On Wednesday Solo's crew, having rested for a day, headed back to their lead with enough food and light for 24 hours. For many of us it became a rest day, however Peter, Susie, Tim, Kevin, Bev and Laura headed out at 5pm to check some leads in an area known as the Dungeon Maze. Unfortunately Laura pulled a muscle in her back and returned to camp with Susie, who instead of surveying took me on another of her pyjama photo shoots in the borehole around camp, the last time being during the Infernillo camp. By midnight Solo's crew was back in camp. Their going river passage had sumped out after 300m of survey and the second injury of the trip. Solo had managed to slice up his hand pretty badly, when a hold peeled off. Peter's crew came back in the wee hours of the morning having cleaned up a lot of the leads, but not found any significant extensions.

On the 11th all of us headed out from camp together with the intention of pushing the Tasmanian Trunk and the South Park series as hard as we could, as this was likely to be our last survey day. We set out around four in the afternoon and in two hours reached Station 73. At this point three teams headed into the Tasmanian Trunk while the rest of us went into South Park. Bev's original lead had started at the end of the Missouri Crawl an unpleasant piece of passage reminiscent of some of Mendip's nastier offerings. However, they had mapped most of the nasty stuff and Bev, Matt and I got to start our survey in nice walking passage, while Susie, Kevin and Laura leapfrogged ahead. After 130m of survey (not the 200m Kevin had claimed when he scooped it) we met up with Susie who had stopped while her crew checked a muddy crawl. They came back reporting that it soon opened into bigger stuff so leaving them the crawl, we leapfrogged ahead to survey the Worcestershire Zombie passage. The others soon overtook us but by the time we caught up with them the passage had gotten nasty so we called it a day, getting back to camp around 5 am. Between us we added 450m of survey

Peter, Nancy and Soriano came into camp right behind us. They had mapped 380m of loops off the Tasmanian Trunk. Ray, Aaron and Gustavo made the connection between the Tasmanian Trunk and the Chihue Frihue at the Weird Place, while Charley, Bill and Solo had mapped 380m in an upstream side lead off the Trunk, which they named Seven of Nine Borehole. It looped back into the Trunk near the climb into the Gargoyle gallery, significantly shortening their trip back to camp. It was while tackling a fairly nasty downclimb in this area that Solo managed to take a significant amount of skin off his back, his second and more significant injury.

The group remained dormant until late the following afternoon when we all gathered up at Peter and Susie's spot to eat the rest of our food and watch the "Peterplotter" at work. This amazing device consists of Peter plotting the survey notes onto the line plot to give us an idea of what we had achieved (when this was later done with the aid of a computer, the Peterplotter proved to be amazingly accurate). This task was greatly eased, the watching that is, when Ray appeared in shirt and tie with a quart of Jack Daniels. These items, and the walkman he brought down, went a long way to explaining the monster duffle.

After a nap and more food it was time to pack the duffs and head for the surface. Unfortunately our plans to stagger departures did not really work, so after leaving camp at 1am I spent the next hour waiting at the bottom of the drop into Sal de Puente. This did allow time for us to attempt to waterproof Solo's back with duct tape, in order to try and stop it getting infected by the polluted water in the entrance series, which serves as a local sewer. From then on everyone was pretty much caving solo, except for brief chats at each successive rope drop. With a lighter duffle and a week of caving behind me the trip out was fairly painless and I found myself climbing the bulldozer tread around 7am. We recovered the trucks, lit a fire and enjoyed beer and cookies while waiting for everyone else to exit. The derig crew surface around 11am having left camp at 6.

We regrouped, sorted out the gear we had carried out, and then headed down the mountain to dirty up the swimming hole. That completed we had time for a meal in Victoria before the group split up. While most of us were heading north, Matt, Nancy, Charley and Soriano were heading down to another caving trip in Chiapas (in fact Matt and Nancy had two months of caving ahead of them before they would return to the States).

All in all it was a very successful expedition, we mapped nearly 4km of passage pushing Tecolote to 36km. As is often the case with PEP expeditions we found more leads than we mapped, but perhaps most importantly for me I got to enjoy my annual cave trip with a great bunch of folks !

A Day trip to Daren

Tim Francis

Way back in the mists of time, 1991 I think it was, myself and Joel Corrigan (an MCG member at the time) went for a jaunt in Daren to the Restaurant and back. The plan was to take a look at the pretties at the Icing on the Cake and breathe in the mouldy atmosphere of the camp. For some reason we did this trip overnight in winter so emerged outside at 5am on a bitterly cold Llangattock night, suffering from a severe lack of sleep and o.d.-ed on Ribena and chocolate. No fun if you have to chip the ice of the entrance puddle. Anyway I digress. Despite our sorry state we thought it would be even more fun to do the whole of Daren in a day rather than a mere 15 hours. The trip was christened a "A day trip to Dweebland". Eight years later and I'd finally persuaded three others and myself that it really would be fun. Saturday, May 30th was to be the chosen day.

To make things a little more sporting we elected to start off at 7am in Basingstoke. The disadvantage was having to get up at some hideous hour in the morning. But this was felt to be outweighed by getting two breakfasts in our bellies and avoiding the rigours of the infamous Chelsea bunks. Before leaving Whitewalls we booked our bunks for the Sunday night and I optimistically chalked up the details on the call out board: Cave – Daren, Route – Dweebland, In – 1pm, Out – lunchtime Sunday. And so to the entrance. The four of us were: Pete Bennett - once seen the start of the Time Machine when a baby mole so it seemed sensible to see the other bits; Ben Cooper - never done Daren before but quite liked the Draenen trips, so thought it might be his bag; Tim Francis - knees so knackered one more amble down the crawl shouldn't make a great deal of difference; Julie Hesketh - been digging at 12 O'clock high and the stuff beyond the Micron seemed intriguing.

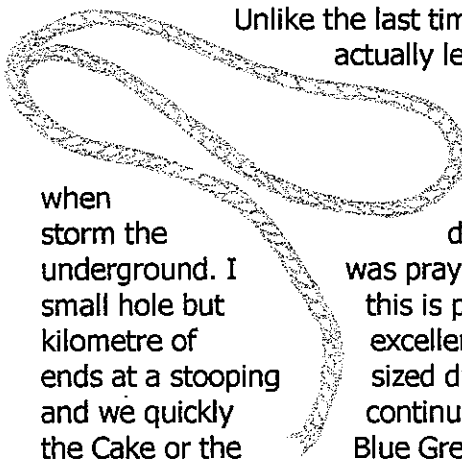
Technically speaking Daren is fairly easy. It's more about endurance, both mental and physical, than the actual difficulty. The entrance crawl took us the usual hour with water levels average. The only surprise was for Ben at the Playschool squeezes (triangle, round and square windows) where he only just fitted through. These days there is a telephone cable neatly rigged all the way through the entrance crawl so at the worst you could always ring the Crickhowell Indian for a home delivery. From the end of the crawl it's all mainly big stuff via Jigsaw Passage to the logbook at Big Chamber Nowhere near the Entrance. We signed in and then headed up and to the right through all those chokey bits before St. Valentines Chamber and the pitch. The Daren fixed ladder gets no easier to climb despite having watched all those lemurs in the summer. There are a few more mud figurines at the top than the last time I was down a few years ago, but it's all very tasteful when compared to Campana especially since Gaping Jill seems to have disappeared. We'd brought a few crabs for the traverse so that proved pretty straightforward. Then it's down the handlines to White Passage and the Time Machine, which still manages to impress.

It's about this point that a glance at the survey reveals how far it really is to the end. Ah well, we plod on down the boulders of the Time Machine, down the climb into the Bonsai Streamway and downstream passing Crystal inlet on the left. I did my tourist guide bit for Pete and Ben – highlights are the crystals in the Time Machine, the Bonsai trees and those huge straws on the left - whilst Ben briefly took us through 'life, the universe and everything' to while away the time. At the end of the Bonsai Streamway the water runs into a small crack and this is the last time you see even a smidgen of water until the bottom of the Micron. The way on is up to the right into the Kings Road, a rather pleasant piece of passage. We were a little behind schedule at this point so there was no time for a detour to the terminal sump. Instead we turned uphill into the sandy crawls of the Rock Steady Cruise. Despite it being a bank holiday there was no one in residence at the Hard Rock Café to make us a cup of tea. So we had to make do with a slug of water and the first of many chocolate bars. Outrageous.



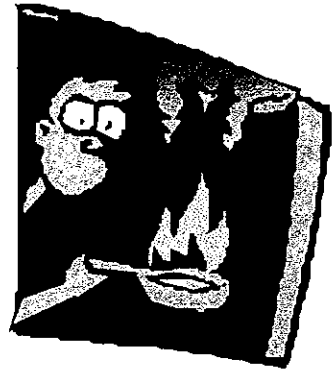
More on Daren :

The Rock Steady Cruise is one of my favourite bits of Daren with lots of nice crawly bits, sand squeezes and delightful passage shapes. As you head back uphill into the Llangattock Mountain the passage slowly re-enters a thinly bedded layer and pops out in a small chamber, Brazil. This marks the start of a section of more unpleasant stuff. 12 O'clock High heads off on the left but we continued ahead into Acupuncture passage, ok on the way in but rather bad on the knees on the way back. The squeeze of Miami Vice doesn't present much of an obstacle to the Mendip caver. The highlights of this bit are some excellent crystals in the roof at the beginning. Eventually Acupuncture opens up into a larger sandy chamber with the funnel of the Micron in the floor.



Unlike the last time I was here we could hear the streamway a long time before we actually left the crawl. A handline drops you into the Borrowed Boots Streamway and the large volume confused me somewhat. The area at the base of the Micron is normally dry but this time there was quite a torrent. The weather outside had been fine we entered but unbeknown to us there had been quite a hefty day before and another one a few hours after we had gone when storm the underground. I small hole but kilometre of ends at a stooping and we quickly the Cake or the was praying that the duck would be open. The stream emerges from a this is passed by following the Ankle Grinder bypass. This is a half excellent sculptured overflow stream passage with nice colouration. It sized duck, which luckily was open. From here things are much bigger continued upstream to Jacobs Ladder. We didn't detour to the Icing on Blue Greenies but both these formations are definitely worth a butchers if you're passing. Again my memory became a bit fuzzy but we eventually found the ladder. This now has a fixed ladder, Daren style, with the old electron ladder still in a heap on the side.

Jacobs ladder is only 20ft up which is lucky as you're rather tired when you get here. Immediately at the top is the final camp of the restaurant at the End of the Universe. And yes it still smells of the same mould after seven years. It had taken us about seven and a half hours to get to this point. In true MCG style we got out the stove and brewed up a cup of tea. Candles were lit to help the convivial atmosphere. More chocolate, dried fruit and nuts were consumed. We had a good look at the survey and estimated the amount of caving left. Ben and Julie elected to look after the food and crash out in some distinctly odourous sleeping bags. So just myself and Little Peat decided to plod on and see how far we got.



Well at last for me I was in to new territory. The way on was at the back of the camp through some nice phreatic passages. Even here there are a few humourous signs that have been carried in. A climb up out of Cordillera Blanca Chamber and a wriggle through the Eyehole eventually leads to the head of the last pitch in Daren. You start to feel rather remote at this point especially as it was just the two of us. The 35ft pitch is still rigged with an electron ladder so the krabs and fig. 8 were a necessity. The next section, Agua Colarada, has some nice caving and we were still sufficiently alert to enjoy it. Time was lost having to continually consult the survey as the way on isn't always that obvious. At Matchu Pitchu we did a hundred feet of unnecessary crawling before we guessed it was the wrong way. It all gets a bit crawlier but eventually you get to the psychological point where the passage trends southish again. More flat out crawling leads to some walking sized stuff at Friday the Thirteenth.

Daren, the end :

At this point time was pressing so we decided to continue as far as the Dades choke, an obvious turning round point. It all became a bit of a plod along the survey as we headed to our destination. Friday the Thirteenth gets small passing Shit Rift on the left and ends at small choke. We squeezed up through this, over a puddle, into the varied going of Payoff Passage, through the squeeze at Bad Bat, stoop along Still Warthogs After All These Years, and finally turning right into the Dades Choke. What a relief. Straight-ahead are the digs and crawls of Sick Choke, Spaderunner and Dweebland, which at this point we really couldn't be bothered with.

It was now 11 O'clock at night and we'd been caving for ten hours which I thought was enough in anyone's book. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep seemed a fitting finale to munch a Mars bar (we'd left the water behind). There's a laminated survey here which shows the various radio location points and how close you are to Aggy – 40m.

So it was turn around time and back to the others at the camp. It was all relatively straightforward and we were looking forward to a cup of tea. When we got back we found out that we'd been gone for four hours. Ben and Julie had just got the food going and a brew ready, which was a welcome sight I can tell you. Much appreciated although the first packet of rehydrated stuff proved to be disgusting and inedible. My survival bag had also suffered due to an errant candle but I supposed that kept the weight down.

Camp was cleared and it was the long slog out. For me the worst part was the lack of sleep. I've never been much of a fan of caving overnight at the best of times. We made good progress back to the Hard Rock with only a few breathers. Thrutching along Acupuncture with a tackle bag was the worst bit. Someone else can carry the kit next time (did I say next time?!). Anyway munchies were taken at the Hard Rock then it was a slog back up the Bonsai Streamway and Time Machine. Sitting down wasn't always the best idea as it was so tempting to close your eyes for a quick kip. We stopped for a final cup of tea at the bottom of the handlines in White Passage and hoovered up most of the remaining food. I think everyone perked up a bit at this point probably because it was early morning and the old biorhythms were kicking in. Then its back up the handlines, around the traverse, down the pitch, up through Valentines and the sign out in the log book in Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance. Then Jigsaw and the crawl. Amazingly the crawl didn't seem too bad and only took just over an hour. Then it was out into the glorious sunshi....I mean drizzle of a Llangattock afternoon. Trip time? Bang on 24 hours.

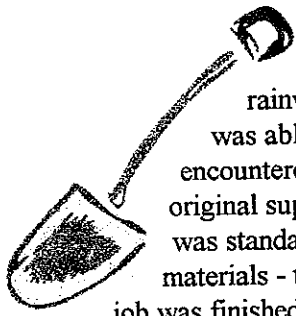
Back at Whitewalls we tried to get a few hours kip but this was difficult as people were working on the cottage. Whilst we were underground Arthur Millett and Duncan Price from the Chelsea had looked at the call out board and wondered what we had meant by Sunday lunchtime. 12pm, 1pm or 2pm but then figured that as we were from the MCG we probably had high tea at 4 o'clock so they weren't going to worry until the pub opened. As for us it was straight down the Bear for a huge blow out and a few pints. Slowly in the warm fug of the pub the trip seemed a bit of fun despite the bruises, feet looking all squishy, and lack of sleep. It's definitely worth a go if you want to try probably the most challenging trip that you can do in a day in the British Isles. For me it's the one trip I've wanted to do for absolutely ages and at last I've done it. All that's left is the connection to Aggy ("I want that final chapter") so that we can do the through trip. Maybe next year.

Team: Pete Bennett, Ben Cooper, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh

Cottage Work Weekend, by Ben Cooper 4th - 5th & 6th of June

This was my first major task to organise as cottage warden, and I was very touched by everybody's help, encouragement and hard work. We managed to complete all the tasks on my list - which I had never expected to achieve. A big thank you to Andrew Shann, Brian Snell, Dave Tooke, Joan Goddard, JP Burch, Julie Hesketh, Marcus Ward, Richard Carey, Simon Goddard, Tim Francis, and Zoe Hammersley.

The list of Things-to-Do was slightly changed from the insert I sent out in the newsletter. Basically, I decided to postpone work on the window frames, and in view of the weather, this was a lucky choice. But that left plenty else to do, with the overall focus on the library extension, inside and out.



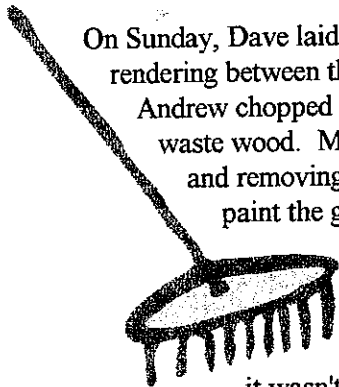
Anybody who attended Tim's birthday barbecue two weeks previously will know the dangers of falling in the open trench, so priority number one was to complete the rainwater drain. Wayne Hiscox had arranged delivery of the outstanding piping, so Brian was able to make an early start, so early in fact that everyone else was still in bed! He soon encountered the first problem - the new pipes were slightly smaller than the originals! The original supplier had gone out of business, but we had all assumed that a standard 100mm pipe was standard. Wrong! Anyway, the problem was solved with the purchase of some extra materials - thanks to the shopping efforts of Tim, Simon and Joan. JP also got stuck in, and the job was finished by early afternoon. Meanwhile, I finished the guttering and fitted the down pipes - too early, as an untimely downpour proved everything worked, flooding the trench Brian and JP were still trying to dig!

Andrew finished the painting of the library loft hatch, despite hangover. Joan had brought the carpet tiles, and Richard made an early start on laying them and finished the job almost single handedly. Tim replaced the support post at the back of the cottage, and Joan finished painting the front door. This meant that we could not close the door all night - so Andrew gallantly volunteered to housesit while the rest of us went off to the pub for the evening!



On Sunday, Dave laid some concrete over the drains, while Simon repaired the rendering between the cottage and library extension, and one or two other places.

Andrew chopped up and burnt the fallen branches and tidied up the wood pile and burnt the waste wood. Marcus, Zoe and Dave started the huge job of turning over the front half of the lawn and removing the worst of the stones. Tim cleared the mud pile from the Fry's land. Julie started to paint the gas store door, but the door is so rotten, we decided to abandon it. Instead she undercoated the side door, but this too is suffering from bad rot at the base. The problem seems to be that no weather-boards were ever fitted to these doors. Joan cleaned up all our muddy footprints. I fitted door closers to the front and back doors, and generally gave advice whenever it was asked for, and occasionally when



it wasn't!

What Next

The primary task to be completed is the front of the side lawn. About half of it is still to be turned over to remove the worst of the rocks, and then it needs to be raked and the clay broken down. We have quite a lot of leaf mold, which can be turned in. So, if you are at the cottage and have an hour to spare, please grab a spade and get digging!

Geoff Sits In Chair Record Shock

proximately 47 minutes or so Geoff was a chair. The MCG AGM was perhaps the shortest on record, and so sound of it worth turning up to!

-----ooOoo-----

re getting changed now and walking to the Pub for a , announced Dave. He, Lettie, Marcus, Zoe, Brian and t marched out to the Seymour Arms in Blagdon. The minibus left about twenty minutes later. By the time econd bus passed them they were still several hundred s from the pub. Dave, Marcus and Zoe hitched a lift. nwhile, some of those left at the cottage had time for a t glass of wine. I love it when a plan comes together!

e Pittman and Charlie were almost refused entry at the r by Bill and Lynn - 'The Style Police' for not having



The Fine Calcite Formations
in Ogof Draenen

their ties quite straight. Big Tim was dressed as 'The Management'. Little Tim was short. Julie was purple and beige. And Lettie had legs. Meanwhile Lynn spotted a loose thread on Pete Moseley's jacket. Rapid intervention by a NATO peace-keeping force prevented an unpleasant episode of sartorial cleansing.

The menu was most interesting, and in some cases challenging. The onion soup was deemed a success mainly because it was soup and had onion in it. Norma's potato skins were more entertaining, mainly because she didn't really like potato skins. "Well when you order oysters you don't eat the shells. Do you?" Quite right - their texture is too crunchy to go with the soft shell fish. Bernard announced that the beef was 'alright'. Attempting to eat the duck was like the early years at Upper Flood - a lot of effort for very little reward. Andy Shann and Charlie could not identify which bits of duck they were actually eating but they did conclude a chainsaw was probably involved at some stage in its life.

Analysis of Events

Booze Drunk



Grade Five Caves Solo'd Without Light

Botanists found themselves ecstatic at the discovery of a new species of broccoli. Most of us have to settle for the tasty green crispy stuff, however certain Mendip eateries have a seemingly endless supply of a grey, limp, and tasteless variety.

The long walk seemed to have drained poor Marcus' mental faculties. "Another beer?"

No response - blank stare. "Another beer?"

"Urgh?"

"You know the five of us arrived at the same time and beer appeared?"

"Err, yes"

"Well Dave got the first lot in, I am now getting the next lot, and some one else will buy the third. This is then repeated until the bar closes or we pass out. This process is called 'a round'.

Another beer?"

"Oh, er, yeah, right - good idea! A pint of Dartmoor."

This lapse was, however, short lived. Yvonne was later congratulated at having raised such a fine waywood son.

More on the AGM...

Brian Pittman and Mike Lovell were also congratulated for sporting some rather fine loud shirts.

The carrots were declared as "not cooked soft enough" by Malcolm and many others, although unfortunately none were re-produced by anybody later in the evening to test this theory.

Charlie declared he was an apricot mousse. This was later explained as an order for dessert, and not the mush inside his head.

Geoff recited some jovial anecdotes which are not reproduced here as Joan will probably moan. Charlie said something amusing and Lynn hit him.

The tables were well placed. Apart from a few satellites they were all equidistant from the bar. The central run was reserved for People With Beards. Others were on the periphery.

Towards the end of the meal Tim stood on a chair and said something. Everybody went "Raaayyyy," or similar. Not content with that he stood on a chair again and hit a glass with a spoon until it broke. Everybody went "Raaayyyy," or similar a bit louder and applauded. Congratulations to Pete Moseley for booking this. We need to support alternative comedians, and this was certainly an alternative to comedy. More dodgy car boot sale than comedy store.

The entertainment continued - Ben had organised a slide show of the recent bumble to Madagascar together with some insidiously addictive music. Confusingly it contained pictures of people caving - whatever that is. Inspired by Claude "I can flog dozens of paintings of the same bit of pondweed from slightly different angles" Monet he then went on to show dozens of slides of the same bit of calcite in Ogof Draenen from slightly different angles. They were of very good quality though.

During the course of the evening it was discovered, or rather decided, that Bill has a double life as an international jet-setter with a yacht and private plane. We shall have the pictures as soon as they have been 're touched' in PhotoShop. Well that solves the problem of the year 2000 MCG expedition. Although Monte Carlo is not renowned for its caving we should take a gamble and go there.

Martin was shocked to discover that he had a beard. For many years he had assumed that the strange growth on his face was mould.

Butch signalled his appreciation of the evening by falling asleep and snoring in the middle of his table. The bidding for the picture (yes it does exist) starts at....

Anxious to repeat his performance of previous New Year events Mike Pittman proceeded to down the Drambuie flamers faster than a greyhound on speed. Bernard took some photos.

Tony Knibbs, Wayne, and Martin together with their backing group 'The Strangled Cats' started singing. It was something about caving and zider and chunky jumpers and 'sailing from Liverpool never to return'. It would seem that their sound is based on the barber's shop style - Sweeny Todd's that is. Pete

Moseley announced that the bus was leaving.

Mouldy and Scummy should open a new file. The cottage post dinner is a strange combination of dimensions and time zones. Just moments ago we were knocking back the Dartmoor and we suddenly find ourselves in Mendip. When we got back the same insidiously addictive music was playing. On the same ghetto blaster as in the pub. Spooky. There were many more beers consumed and conversations based on pairs of round spherical objects.

10,000 people were signed up for the next episode of Madagascar 'The Lemurs Strike Back'. This is where Tim gets frozen in carbide by the dodgy cottage warden Wessex the Hut. Malcolm is Yodel the Jedi master although he has to say 'Hmmm!' instead of 'Ahh!'. No one was Puke Piewalker or Princess Layer though. Bernard's snoring was sampled for Daft Cavers' voice who surprises them all at Upper Flood II - the city in the clouds. Hype and a trailer is available at www.reallyexpensivephonebill.com



Marcus
'One Earthenware Jar of Beer'
The Wise

The conversation then turned to stupefied people sitting in various old chairs exclaiming "Drink!", "Fek!", "Arse!". Unfortunately neither Ted nor its father J.P. could attend the evening's proceedings.

Pete Bennett demonstrated a fine display of forging involving a red hot poker and an axe (he is short listed for the job of Baby Eating Bishop of Bath and Wells - a cunning plan my Lord). The next morning Bernard had thought a wall was being knocked through. Good idea - anybody got any SLB? Or perhaps we should wait for a passing Tornado and shine our laser pointers at the wall.

Also the next morning some people went caving, except Marcus The Wise. For some odd reason he had organised an Upper Flood trip for 08:00 on the Sunday morning after the MCG dinner. Clever or what? Fortunately the trip-ees turned up around 11 ish in a similar state of disrepair and didn't go caving.

All most entertaining. The committee decided to invest its last few millions in Alka Seltzer.

by Charlie Allison

4th EUROPEAN EXPLORATION SPELEOLOGY CONGRESS FIRST CIRCULAR

**29th April - 1st May 2000
Château de Marteau-Longe
PROFONDEVILLE
BELGIUM**

After Italy, France and United Kingdom, the 4th Exploration Speleology Congress will soon be organised in Belgium. It's now the turn of the Belgian speleo community to propose you to share your last darkness experiences and results.

Profondeville, located just in the heart of the Waloons' Karst, will accommodate this congress from April 29th until the 1st May 2000.

Aims and Objectives:

- * Gather speleo exploration enthusiasts together in a relaxed atmosphere
- * Share our last personal experiences and thrills in varied speleo topics such as: last discoveries, new techniques, rescue, diving, cave surveying, data classification, protection of caves, access regulations....
- *The 1998 - 2000 European Caving Expeditions: last discoveries, new techniques, rescue, diving, cave surveying, data classification, protection of caves, access regulations...

Registration:

The price will be around 60??, this will cover inscription fees, sleeping accommodation and meals (acts will be in extra). Please, if you want to receive more details about this congress contact:

Organised by:

Commission Exploration de l'Union Belge de Spéléologie

Please contact:

Union Belge de Spéléologie
Rue Belvaux, 93
B-4030 LIEGE-GRIVEGNEE
BELGIUM
Tel: 32/4-342.61.42
Fax: 32/4-342.11.56
E-Mail: ubs@speleo.be/explo2000